

CALIFORNIA FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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Statewide News

FROM SACRAMENTO

FEDERATION OF POOR PLANNED AT OAKLAND CONVENTION

The first statewide convention of delegates from organizations of the poor met in Oakland the last weekend in February and set in motion plans to establish a California Federation of the Poor. These plans culminated two days of discussion which sharpened issues confronting these groups, produced useful exchange of experience and ideas, and strengthened the determination of the delegates to step-up their local and statewide efforts.

Continuation of the work and plans of the convention is being handled by a provisional steering committee, on which there will be one representative from each participating organization. The committee has tentatively scheduled a meeting in Fresno for later this month. The FEDERATION will include within its structure three statewide councils to serve the interests of welfare rights, tenants and anti-poverty organizations.

The material which follows was taken from drafts being used for the official proceedings and summary of the convention. (See Note below on how to obtain this official document.)

Who Was There

175 delegates from about 50 groups attended the convention, along with technical experts selected by the planning committee, and a small group of observers and representatives from such groups as the CITIZENS CRUSADE AGAINST POVERTY (Washington), the OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY (Washington, Sacramento and Los Angeles), and the STATE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE (Sacramento).

Sponsors and Funding

The convention was staffed by the OAKLAND PROJECT, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA EXTENSION, the CALIFORNIA CENTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, and the FOUNDATION. It was funded by the SEARS FOUNDATION, OAKLAND COUNCIL OF SOCIAL PLANNING, and the OAKLAND PROJECT.

Themes and Tone

The theme of the convention was unity of all low-income groups and the repeated note in all sessions was the necessity for movement by these groups separately and jointly to produce change in the welfare, housing and anti-poverty programs. There was unanimity of feeling that these programs and establishments were now only giving token response and attention to the views and proposals from the poor.

*The bulletins of the FOUNDATION are issued primarily in the interests of low-income groups, but are also available to others concerned about poverty in California.

There was anger, indignation and frustration in the voices and comments of delegates, perhaps sharpest against the anti-poverty program which has promised participation to the poor but not delivered on this promise. But criticism was not gentle toward public welfare operations, which appear relatively progressive in state law and regulation but usually punitive and reactionary in local administration. Criticism was also detailed and biting against both public housing authorities and slumlords--the former for failing in practice to realize the early dreams of low-cost public housing, and the latter for perpetuating substandard housing at outrageous rents.

Anti-Poverty Workshops and Resolutions

From participants in this workshop came the comment: "The first two hours were spent screaming, explaining, pleading and negating the war on poverty in its present forms." Disenchantment was so marked that feelings ran high in favor of a demand for stoppage of the total program until participation of the poor and upgrading of the program itself was assured. From the workshop and the convention came telegrams to all governmental levels protesting what was reported as a particularly flagrant failure to permit participation and meet poverty problems in Fontana, San Bernardino County.

The resolution from this section emphasized participation of the poor at all stages and levels of the program, an opportunity for them to create and evaluate program proposals, a stepping-up of funding of approved programs, and a new effort to relate these proposals to priority needs of the poor for jobs, for opportunities and for improvement in housing and neighborhood conditions.

Welfare Workshop and Resolutions

This group directed its fire against the repressive, blocking character of administration in most county welfare offices. Resentment was sharp against the "image" of recipients as "chiselers" or "immoral" persons projected by righteous critics of the welfare system through willing news media, and receptive civic groups. Welfare rights organizations cited chapter and verse of their troubles and their achievements in helping their members get the benefits of federal and state laws and regulations despite the negativism of county welfare administration.

The resolutions from this group stressed need for funding from the state welfare system, or other possible resources; urged state administration under a new State Social Welfare Board, including a majority of recipients; abolition of residence laws; meaningful educational and vocational training; and higher housing allowances and maximums in the AFDC program.

Housing Workshop and Resolutions

The tenants and housing groups reviewed their difficulties with housing authorities and project managers and their low level of protection against abuse by absentee slumlords. On the public housing front discussion pointed up the strange legal fact that local housing authorities were almost a "law-unto-themselves" group--neither supervised nor controlled by federal or state agencies in any clear or comprehensive fashion, and therefore able to treat tenants as if they are serfs. Suggestions came from groups which had been successful in finding out how to deal with this public relic of feudalism. Also spelled out in the workshop were ways to reduce the life and death control of ghetto landlords, although the problems in dealing with code enforcement agencies to obtain action for repairs and decent housing conditions in privately owned slums are becoming more and not less severe.

Resolutions from this group included: Creation of a statewide tenants' council; simpler leases in housing projects, and a change in emphasis from profit to tenant service; rent freezes in all housing, and state rent control; and no urban renewal or removal until slum housing is replaced for those forced to move.

Summary

The delegates, who came from such widely separate points as San Diego and Chico, Fontana and Mar Vista, Hunters Point and Watts, Dos Palos and Delano, were by the end of the convention together, joined in a new commitment to democratic principles protecting inviolate rights to organize and improve their own conditions of life.

NOTE: A copy of the official proceedings and summary of the convention can be obtained by writing for it to Lewis P. Harris, Assistant Liaison Officer, OAKLAND PROJECT, University of California Extension, 2223 Fulton Street, Berkeley, California, 94720.

LEGISLATIVE AND CAPITAL SCENE

The Budget Session

Sub-Committee hearings on the budget, and closer scrutiny of it, reveal points on which poor peoples' groups should be alerted:

Funding of Recipient Organizations, although thus far blocked by unwilling bureaucrats may become impossible or more difficult in the next fiscal year, beginning July 1st. The specific budget item (\$100,000) for this purpose has been deleted for next year in the welfare department's budget request. Therefore, any project funds for this will have to come out of an already low total for all demonstration projects (\$282,000) and may face even tougher resistance from the state department of finance.

"Closed-End" Appropriations are again being insistently sought by the Legislative Analyst and the leadership of the minority party. The purpose of this proposal is to force reductions in welfare grants to the aged, blind, and disabled and to dependent families whenever the entitlements of all recipients exceed the fixed and "closed" dollar totals set by the Legislature. J. M. Wedemeyer, director of SDSW told a Senate Finance sub-committee that if the budget were so restricted he would be required this summer to make cuts in grants or run the risk of running out of money the following spring. Assemblyman Waldie (D-Antioch) opposed the "closed-end" idea in an Assembly Ways and Means sub-committee, and likened the proposal to "telling school children to stay home because we have no money to educate you." The sub-committee voted against Waldie and for the Legislative Analyst, but the struggle is hardly begun in the legislative process.

Badly Needed Funds for Increased AFDC Housing Allowances, estimated at about \$5 millions, are not in the budget. So there is no money to permit 23 counties which want to increase these allowances to come close to 1964 housing costs, even when maximums permit such increases. Assemblyman Dymally (D-Los Angeles) is attempting to persuade Administration and Legislative leaders that the budget should be augmented to provide these housing increases.

COMMENT: Assemblymen Dymally and Waldie will need support for their positions and your own Assemblymen and Senators should know your views on these issues.

The Special Session

The OLD FOLKS LOBBY again is giving lessons to other groups on how to obtain benefits from legislation by its persistent work on tax relief for the elderly and a bill to permit recipients to retain rather than lose a social security increase.

The law-enforcement side of implementing the McCONE REPORT seems to be getting more attention thus far than the social and economic side. The Assembly has already passed and sent to the Senate a bill making possession of "Molotov" cocktails a felony and increasing penalties for fire-setting during "riots". Assemblyman Stanton (D-San Jose) was one of the six Democratic Assemblymen who voted against the bill. He called it "absurd . . . and hysterical."

Medicare

The regulations are now out for the "new" program which became effective on March 1, and it looks more and more, according to technical experts, like the "old" one. Press-puffing to the contrary, medically needy persons and families who are not getting public aid will get only hospital care under the new program, plus 90 days follow-up care from doctors after hospitalization. They will not get other care from doctors. Only the AFDC mothers and children seem to benefit appreciably from the first administrative steps under the Casey bill, since they are now eligible for a range of services previously available only to the aged, blind and disabled.

The inside explanation as to why medically needy persons not on aid will get so little from the new program is that the big slug of new federal money (which California earned by the new law) was used up by substantial rate increases for doctors, increased payments to county hospitals, and full protection of county taxpayers against any increase in their tax levels. In fact all interests seemed to have been served well by the new federal money except those of the poor.

QUESTION: Does the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare believe that California's new program satisfies the spirit as well as the substance of the Federal Law?

TWO MAJOR PROJECTS OF THE CALIFORNIA CENTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As reported in the February BULLETIN, the CCCD's proposal for a Self-Help Service Corps to train community development workers and organizers for rural areas was approved by both Sargent Shriver and the Governor. We applauded both of them, and awarded a special orchid to state anti-poverty chief Dr. Paul F. O'Rourke for his support of the project.

After the contract was signed, it must now be reported, but before funds were received, the Office of Economic Opportunity asked the Center to furnish additional information and to make no further financial arrangements or commitments for the project.

In plain words the project is being held up because large growers in the Valley, and and Congressmen who are their errand boys and hatchet men, are critical of the Center's support of the Delano grape strike. The Board of Directors of the Center is attempting to negotiate and resolve the issues raised, but realistically is girding itself for the likely possibility of a fight for principle and survival.

COMMENT: On February 27, the Fresno Bee printed a full story on the issues related to the hang-up of this project. Reprints of the story are available from the CCCD, P.O. Box 398, Del Rey.

A second important project proposal of the CCCD is an urban one on which decision is due shortly from the Office of Juvenile Delinquency of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. This proposal is for a Social Action Training Center for Ghetto and Barrio Youth "to demonstrate the effectiveness of social action training as a means to help young people create and adapt . . . to the problems of their communities."

SUGGESTION: You may wish to support this imaginative and useful project by writing your Congressmen or one of your U.S. Senators.

ITEMS...

Under the leadership of the NATIONAL FARM WORKERS ASSOCIATION, the Delano grape strike continued to draw support and attention! The strike will be the top item on the agenda of three California hearings by the Senate Sub-Committee on Migratory Farm Labor. The hearings will be held in Sacramento, March 14; Visalia, March 15; and Delano, March 16. It is rumored that the Governor will give his testimony before the Committee at its Delano session, and thus keep the promise he made to the strikers at the CDC Convention in Bakersfield to visit Delano. The Sub-Committee is headed by Senator Williams, and includes the two Kennedys, Nelson, Prouty and Senator Murphy. These hearings may produce significant movement in the strike!

Supporters of the Schenley boycott will be glad to learn that the report that the AFL-CIO was not supporting the boycott is false. The UAW Washington report dated February 28, 1966 said, "You can help California grape strikers by boycotting all Schenley products."

The CALIFORNIA MIGRANT MINISTRY has received few kudos and many lumps for its steadfast support of the grape strike and the strikers. Unregenerate growers and their organizations, other supporters of agri-business and deeply conservative forces from rural and urban churches have almost literally prayed for the MINISTRY to abandon its "Witness" and work in behalf of the rural poor. For years the MINISTRY has been the "Conscience of California" in its devotion to the needs of poverty-stricken people and especially now needs moral and dollar support.

SUGGESTION: Sleep better by sending a generous contribution to the CALIFORNIA MIGRANT MINISTRY, 1411 West Olympic Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. This will entitle you to their Action Mailing bulletins about the grape strike and other peoples' struggles. You should also request a copy of the Church and the Grape Strike, written by Rev. Wayne C. Hartmire, Executive for the MINISTRY.

The CAL-TAX NEWS, issued monthly by the California Taxpayers' Association, is the first such group to recognize the existence of this bulletin (which will not disappear even if not noticed by them). The February issue of their NEWS quoted from the BULLETIN's pre-convention story about Oakland, and its lead was "This is the day of organized effort and welfare recipients are well aware of the benefits to be achieved by organization." Its concluding sentence was "The taxpayer watches with interest."

Your editor regrets that space limits prevent full response, but briefly it should be noted that the California Taxpayers' Association has had a long-standing confusion about taxpayers, since it has failed to recognize that everyone, including the poor, pay taxes. The Association has also been unclear about the identity of interests of all taxpayers in a healthy economy and in decent communities, which cannot be achieved except through effective and pervasive programs against low incomes and poverty.

Apropos of the last sentence in the NEWS, poor peoples' groups might well ask, "Who watches Cal-Tax?"

JEROME N. SAMPSON

Tear Off Coupon

FRIENDLY FOLK WHO HAVE NOT YET SUBSCRIBED TO THE BULLETIN tell us that they feel "VERY GUILTY". Such guilt is easily assuaged and handled! The Friendly Folk need only send \$1 for 5 issues; or \$2 for 10 issues; or help widen our free distribution to low-income groups with \$_____ as a tax-deductible contribution. Please make out check to Jerome N. Sampson, and send with this coupon to P.O. Box 8856, Sacramento, California, 95822.